

OPINION

Classroom



With
Larry
Ferlazzo

Response: 'You Can't Get to Bloom Without Going Through Maslow'

By [Larry Ferlazzo](#) on October 22, 2018 2:28 PM

The new question-of-the-week is:

What are the best ways to build relationships with students?

[This series was kicked-off](#) with responses from Adeyemi Stenbridge, Candace Hines, Jacki Glasper, Mary Beth Nicklaus, Valentina Gonzalez, and Julie Jee. You can listen to a [10-minute conversation](#) I had with Adeyemi, Candace, Jacki and Mary Beth on [my BAM! Radio Show](#). You can find a list of, and links to, [previous shows here](#).

[Part Two](#)'s guests were Timothy Hilton, Valerie Ruckes, David Bosso, Jenny Edwards, Pamela Broussard, Kara Prantikoff, Patty McGee, and Jonathan Eckert.

In [Part Three](#), Debbie Silver, Nedra Robinson, Tamera Musiowsky, John Seborowski, Bryan Christopher, Becca Leech, Kelly Wickham Hurst, and Diane Mora contributed their ideas.

In [Part Four](#), Lisa Westman, Kevin Parr, Dr. Cynthia "Mama J" Johnson, Ryan Huels, Catherine Beck, Dr. Sheila M. Wilson, Ed.D., and Steve Constantino provided commentaries on the topic.

In [Part Five](#), it was time for Jana Echevarria, Dr. Beth Gotcher, Joe Mullikin, Denise Fawcett Facey, Rachelle Dene Poth, Chris Hull, Douglas Reeves, and Melissa Jackson to share their thoughts.

[Part Six](#) was given over to Sanée Bell, Martha Caldwell, Oman Frame, Sarah Kirby-Gonzalez, Sarah Thomas, Debbie Zacarian, Judie Haynes, Madeline Whitaker Good, Dr. Barbara R. Blackburn, and Akira M. LeBlanc.

In this series' [next-to-last post](#), Julia Thompson, Dr. Mara Lee Grayson, Dr. Kris Felicello, Jennifer Lasater, Kristina DeMoss, Cindy Terebush, and Tamara Fyke wrote their responses.

This series is wrapped-up today by Tara Brown, Dr. Donna Wilson, Dr. Marcus Conyers, Jennifer Cleary, Stuart Ablon, Alisha Pollastri, Eileen Depka, and Richard Gerver. I've also included responses from readers.

Response From Tara Brown

Tara Brown, known as "[The Connection Coach](#)," is president of Learner's Edge Consulting and an award-winning educator, author and international speaker. Tara's 30 - year professional journey as a teacher and coach has taken her coast to coast from rural Florida to urban schools in California and to one of the largest high schools in Tennessee, with over 40 countries represented. In 2005, in Nashville, TN, Tara played a key role in piloting a Leadership Development program at Antioch High School targeting non traditional leaders. Because of the success of this program, it expanded to all high schools in Davidson County and earned Tara the 'Pioneer Award' and 'Teacher of the Year' award in 2006. She holds a Master's degree in Administration and Supervision and is a nationally certified Personal Trainer. Follow Tara on twitter [@tarambrown](#):

The beginning of the year is a critical time to invest in building positive connections with students. Kids of all ages come into a new class with apprehension and questions. 'Am I capable?' 'Will my teacher like me?' 'Will it be safe...to risk? To try? To share?'

Spending time helping students get to know you, you getting to know them, and each to know the other, goes a long way to creating a class community and reducing apprehension and anxiety. A few ways to begin connecting include:

1. Embrace the 'Firm, Fair and Friendly' philosophy.

*Establishing clear expectations is important to letting students know that you are indeed in charge, which will build respect. Some teachers unfortunately are good at the **Fair** and **Firm**, but not so much with the **Friendly**.*

There is a quote I heard years ago that is extremely applicable: 'Rules without relationships leads to rebellion.' We have to remember that we are feeling beings that think, not thinking beings that feel. And our feelings drive our thoughts and decisions.

Emotional deposits through friendliness are a powerful way to connect as well as to increase motivation and engagement.

2. Provide great customer service.

We all know how great it feels when we go into a store or restaurant and employees are genuinely nice, friendly and welcoming. That level of customer service doesn't cost a thing but goes a long way in helping us feel good and increasing our customer loyalty.

As the CEO: Chief Emotional Officer, teachers set the tone and climate of the classroom. It all starts with you, and your energy has a ripple effect on how your students will feel about being in your class. Be willing to greet students at the door, make eye contact, smile, show enthusiasm and welcome them. This helps kids know that they are seen, heard and validated, all of which help deepen connections.

Be respectful to students at all times. Model the behavior that says, 'in spite of anything you say or do, you will be treated with respect in this class.' That message will become part of the culture of the class and impact your relationship-building, as well as foster positive peer relationships.

Seek out ways to have non-contingent, one-on-one conversations with students whenever possible. The more you know about them as individuals, the more willing they will be to engage on a day-to-day basis.

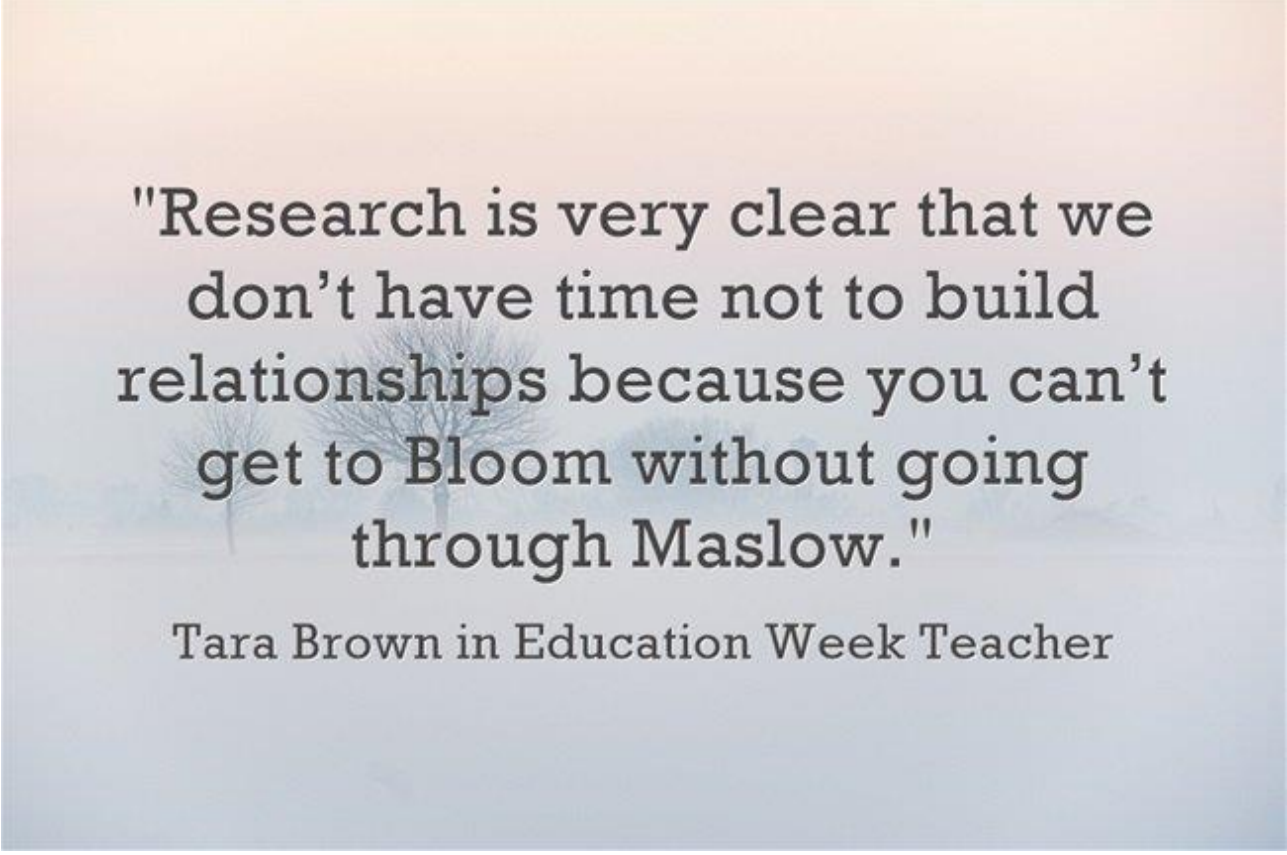
Demonstrate a willingness to be present and attentive when a student approaches your desk and maintain an open, welcoming body language and tone of voice. Your level of openness relays to students that you are emotionally safe and that you want to get to know them as individuals. Until a child feels safe, he/she cannot learn.

3. Create a Family Community

For some kids, the classroom may be the only 'family' they ever really experience. It certainly will be the best chunk of many students' entire days. Investing in time to build positive relationships through team-building exercises to quickly learn names and facts about each other, partner work, sharing student profiles, embracing different nationalities, and more, will all shape the tone and feel of daily peer and teacher interactions.

Many teachers still feel as though 'they don't have time to build relationships with kids'. Research is very clear that we don't have time not to build relationships because you can't

get to Bloom without going through Maslow. Emotions are indeed the Fastlane to the Brain!



"Research is very clear that we don't have time not to build relationships because you can't get to Bloom without going through Maslow."

Tara Brown in Education Week Teacher

Response From Dr. Donna Wilson & Dr. Marcus Conyers

Drs. Donna Wilson and Marcus Conyers are ASCD authors of *Teaching Students to Drive Their Brains: Metacognitive Strategies, Activities, and Lesson Ideas*. The duo co-founded BrainSMART and the Center for Innovative Education and Prevention, professional development groups dedicated to improving teaching and learning through innovative frameworks and strategies for putting research into practice. They have authored 20 books and 75 articles and developed the world's first graduate degree programs in brain-based teaching. Wilson and Conyers' original approach is featured on ASCD's new five-episode video series, *Teaching Students to Drive Their Brains*. The videos feature Donna, along with four classroom teachers, modeling the approach in action:

For over two decades, we have taught educators an exciting, unique, and productive approach they enjoy for relating with students. Our cognitive approach positions the teacher-student relationship as one where effective teachers are expert learners who explicitly teach students how to learn in ways they can use across contexts in academics, life, and on the job. Teachers find this fulfilling because they know how important it will be

for their students to be able to learn new skills to enjoy success across many jobs across their lifespans.

When I [Donna] was working as a psychologist earlier in my career, most of the referrals I received asking for a diagnostic assessment for students with learning challenges indicated they did not have the necessary strategies for learning. For example, they were not able to maintain sufficient attention to learning tasks, listen effectively, control their impulses, make connections during learning, and know how, where, and when to use what they learned across contexts.

In order for students to learn how to use the cognitive strategies listed above and more, many of them need to experience a relationship with a teacher who can teach them. It is true that some students come to school with motivational and cognitive strategies in place to learn effectively. However, today in the Information Age, a growing number of students arrive at the schoolhouse doors without the necessary strategies in place to succeed as learners.

When students have a caring educator, who teaches them how to learn as well as what they need to know, they are ready to take on the world after their school days are done!

"When students have a caring educator, who teaches them how to learn as well as what they need to know, they are ready to take on the world after their school days are done!"

Dr. Donna Wilson & Dr. Marcus Conyers in Ed Week Teacher

Response From Jennifer Cleary

Jennifer A. Cleary is a former teacher and is currently Coordinator of Elementary STEM at the School District of Lancaster. She is co-author of Classroom Techniques for Creating Conditions for Rigorous Instruction (LSI Publishing: 2018), along with Robert J. Marzano and Terry A. Morgan:

"Relationships teachers build with their students have the power to foster success or failure." - Cleary, Morgan, Marzano

Just Ask Students

In 1996, Mouton et al. [conducted a study](#) on students they referred to as "low-attached"--students who lacked a sense of belonging. These students often feel a sense of alienation, which is demonstrated in a number of ways, such as withdrawal from school activities, discipline and attendance issues, negative overall attitudes about school, and dropping out.

Interestingly enough, when students who were labeled as high-risk for these types of school failures succeeded despite their labels, they cited relationships with teachers, counselors, principals, and peers as the ultimate factor in their successes. Students who didn't succeed cited just the opposite. In the study, they were quoted as saying things like "Teachers make me feel dumb," "Teachers don't want me to do well," and "Teachers treat me worse than other students" (Mouton et al., 1996). These feelings of alienation have the potential to cause students to give up altogether (Jensen, 2009).

After compiling research for decades, Dr. Robert Marzano came to a similar conclusion. "The one factor that surfaced as the single most influential component of an effective school is the individual teachers within that school."

Teachers can promote or stifle academic success. It all hinges on the relationships they build with their students.

This is, however, more easily said than done. Establishing effective relationships requires breaking free from the constraints of an academic world that has attempted to sustain order with formulaic programs, strategies, techniques, and scripts. Establishing relationships with students is an art, not a science. It requires a careful balance between dominance and advocacy.

Guidance and control (dominance): *The teacher is responsible for providing clear purpose and strong guidance regarding both academics and student behavior.*

Cooperation and concern (advocacy): *The teacher and the students communicate and perceive a sense of teamwork. This requires the teacher to be emotionally objective and to demonstrate a true concern for students and a sense of community in the classroom.*

A balance of these components creates a powerful overall sense of academic and behavioral purpose while still conveying that the teacher has a personal stake in the success and well-being of the students.

There Is No "One Size Fits All"

There is no "one way" to establish relationships with students. The strategies and techniques used one year may not be necessary in another. Approaches may differ between students, class periods, or subject areas. That's what is exciting about intentionally building these relationships. The teacher learns about the students and begins to understand what each of them needs individually and what the class needs collectively.

Let's look at three categories of techniques for establishing effective relationships with students, as highlighted in the book I recently co-authored with Terry Morgan and Dr. Robert Marzano titled, "Classroom Techniques for Creating Conditions for Rigorous Instruction."

Understanding Students' Interests and Backgrounds

This category has, in a sense, a boomerang effect. Teachers use strategies to show students they care by asking questions and learning about their lives, as well as what motivates them and what difficulties they may be facing. Although early attempts at this may seem contrived or disingenuous, the outcome is that teachers begin to really understand what makes their students tick so they can further support them individually and as a whole class. Some quick examples of ways to understand student interests and backgrounds are:

- *Distribute opinion polls that ask students about their perspectives on classroom content or issues.*
- *Offer one-on-one opportunities for students have conversations about what interests them.*

- Ask students to write an autobiography, but the catch is they can only use six words. Then have them share and explain their autobiographies.
- For the technology-savvy teachers, ask students to tweet a description of their personalities or interests. They could also create a brief online article about their greatest accomplishment, or respond to a Facebook post sharing their opinions related to the original post.

Displaying Objectivity and Control

I'll admit this can be difficult, but in my opinion, it is the most important factor for establishing and maintaining effective relationships with students. Objectivity and control need to be consistent enough to be predictable for students. Regardless of emotions, it is the teacher's responsibility to remain level-headed and in control of his/her emotions. This becomes even more necessary when students' lives and the emotions of those around them cannot be guaranteed outside of the classroom. Often, our most at-risk students do not have the security of being able to predict responses from their caretakers.

- *Through active listening and speaking, teachers should interact with students in a calm and controlled manner. Remain focused on what the student is saying in order to understand his/her viewpoint. Posture, facial expressions, and gestures should remain neutral. Summarize or acknowledge an understanding of what the student has shared.*
- *Reflect daily on consistency in punishment and reward. Determine if interactions with students reflected a balance between the two, as well as a balance between guidance/control and cooperation/concern. Were objectivity and control displayed consistently and do students feel safe in the predictability of emotional responses?*

Indicating Affection

I remember the first time I saw one of my students in public. While on a run, I had accidentally stumbled upon his baseball game, recognized his mom in the stands, and sat down with her. When little Eric looked over at his mom and saw Ms. Cleary sitting there watching him at bat, his eyes lit up and he couldn't have smiled bigger if he tried.

It's important that students understand that their teachers care. As I mentioned earlier, this could be the make-it-or-break-it factor in student success. This doesn't mean teachers need to be out every night of the week attending sporting events--here are some simple ways to show all students affection.

Schedule interaction by selecting a few students each day to seek out and talk to, either in class, after class, or during lunch. A schedule helps ensure all students are shown the same level of attention.

Attend student functions to show students they are cared for. Let students know you'll be at the event, and then make an effort to connect with them at it. If that's not possible, follow up with details to let them know you were there.

Don't underestimate the power of humor. Playful banter, jokes, or self-directed humor are enjoyable, but be sure to keep the humor clean and inoffensive to students. This, again, is when knowing students' backgrounds is key.

You Are Your Students' Number One Factor

Think back to your favorite teacher. Mine was Mrs. Nowicki in second grade. I was an at-risk kid. My dad passed away when I was in kindergarten, and my mom had her hands full with my older sister, who was a bit of a trouble maker. I was no dream for my teachers either - always talking, asking questions, and running around the classroom. I was definitely an active little one!

There was nowhere in the classroom that my desk hadn't been moved. I was used to being yelled at, having teachers roll their eyes, and spending time in the hallway. Then came Mrs. Nowicki. She was strict. She didn't tolerate my behavior, but she found a way to show me she cared about my success. She created a systematic way of communicating my progress (or lack thereof) with my mom and stepdad, and I began to want to behave for her.

That was an important year. It was my fork in the road. I was on the cusp of hating school, because I was so used to "getting in trouble." I credit Mrs. Nowicki with cultivating my love of learning and respecting my individuality. Had she not built and continued to strengthen a relationship with me, perhaps my story wouldn't be what it is.

Mrs. Nowicki was my number one factor, and because of that, I became my students' number one factor.

As educators, we face an increasing list of demands, and continue to be held accountable for the success of our students. We get tethered down with thoughts of content coverage, state testing, and other accountability challenges. In a sea of responsibilities, we must remember why we started this journey. We wanted to make a difference in the lives of our

students. "The significance and gravity of fostering and maintaining effective teacher-student relationships could not be clearer." (Cleary, Morgan, Marzano, 2018)

You are the number one factor.

"...when students who were labeled as high-risk for these types of school failures succeeded despite their labels, they cited relationships with teachers, counselors, principals, and peers as the ultimate factor in their successes."

- Jennifer Cleary in Education Week
Teacher

Response From Stuart Ablon & Alisha Pollastri

Stuart Ablon and Alisha Pollastri are clinical psychologists from the Think:Kids program at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School and are co-authors of the book, *The School Discipline Fix: Changing Behavior Using the Collaborative Problem Solving Approach*. They develop, study, and teach Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS), an evidence-based approach for understanding and helping children who engage in

challenging behaviors such as aggression, oppositionality, withdrawal, and academic avoidance:

Empathy is the foundation of all helping relationships. Empathy is achieved through listening to and understanding students' concerns, perspectives, and points of view. Importantly, an adult does not need to agree with a student's point of view in order to feel, and express, empathy.

When listening empathically to your students, ask lots of questions. Don't make assumptions. Ask additional questions to clarify information, and take a curious, open-minded stance, no matter what you hear. Reflect what you have heard from them without judgement, and be prepared for surprises.

Also, be prepared that the better you listen, the more your students will tell you! This means you may be asked to help them solve problems you didn't even know about before. Fortunately, if this happens, you don't need to have all the answers. Just make sure all the relevant information is on the table, then invite them to lead the problem-solving, with your guidance. Have them brainstorm solutions first, and help them determine whether any of those proposed solution are good enough to try out. For any solution that's suggested, make sure that the solution fully addresses their concerns.

If you respond empathically to a students' concerns, and provide the guidance they need to help them solve their own problems, you will be on your way to developing real helping relationships with your students, and to providing them with the skills they need to be successful well beyond their years in your classroom.

"Empathy is the foundation of all helping relationships. Empathy is achieved through listening to and understanding students' concerns, perspectives, and points of view."

- Stuart Ablon & Alisha Pollastri in Ed Week Teacher

Response From Eileen Depka

Eileen Depka, PhD is an educational consultant and an author of several books, the most recent being *Raising the Rigor*. Eileen has taught in both private and public school systems and has supervised and coordinated curriculum, instruction, assessment, special education, educational technology, and continuous improvement efforts. Her goal is to work with teachers and administrators to collectively increase expertise and add to strategy banks used in educational settings in an effort to positively impact student achievement:

Building relationships with students requires four essential ingredients; respect, consistency, trust, and care.

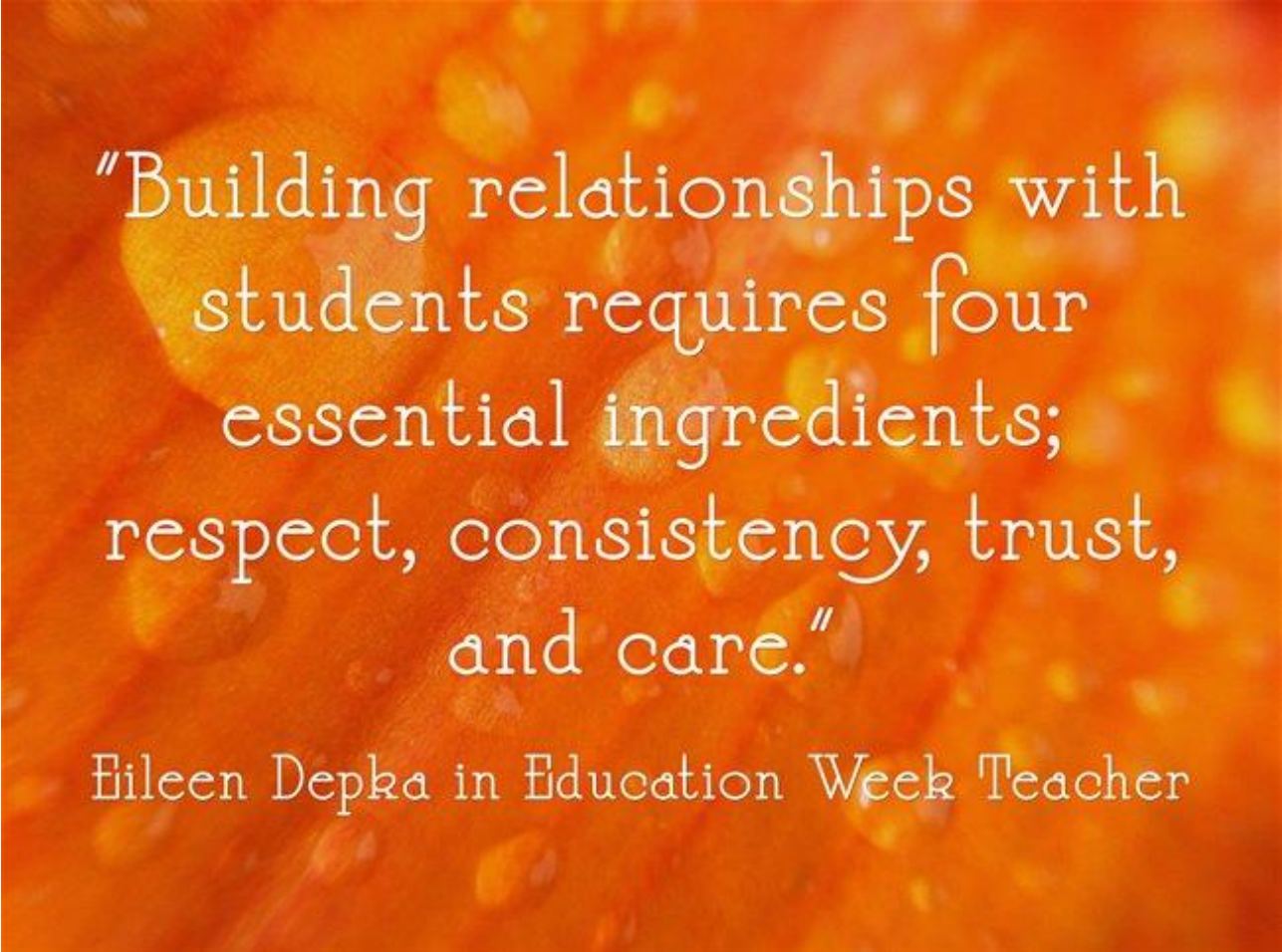
Let's start with respect. No matter the situation, think about how you would want to be treated under similar circumstances. Conversations that require privacy that should be

handled in private. Be fair, be calm, and be a listener. Work to understand students so that you know best how to interact with them.

Consistency in approach increases students' ability to understand and carry out expectations. Make expectations clear. Gain student input. When expectations appear to waiver, when the atmosphere is relaxed because it's Friday, students get confused. Confusion causes a lack of clarity and result in unintended consequences.

Trust is earned through respect and consistency. Say what you mean, and do what you say. If you make a mistake, acknowledge, apologize, and move on. When students see that you are fair, that you treat them with respect, trust will follow.

Lastly, truly care about your students. Know that you have the ability to positively impact their lives through the relationships you inspire, through the time and effort you put into their education, and through your ability to be the catalyst that causes high levels of student academic and personal success.



"Building relationships with students requires four essential ingredients; respect, consistency, trust, and care."

Eileen Depka in Education Week Teacher

Response From Richard Gerver

[Richard Gerver](#) is a former teacher and school leader who has twice been named "Business Speaker of the Year" and has written three critically-acclaimed best-selling books: *Creating Tomorrow's Schools Today*, which is widely regarded as a seminal book in education; and the business best sellers *Simple Thinking* and *Change: Learn to Love it, Learn to Lead it*. He recently contributed a chapter to the book, [Building People: Social-Emotional Learning for Kids, Families, Schools and Communities](#). Follow him on Twitter [@richardgerver](#):

Remember that great teaching and learning is an interactive process and one that requires huge levels of trust. Learning is tough; you often only learn something new at the point of a mistake, or when you realize you don't know something or can't do something. That means, as an educator, you have to develop an environment which feels safe and where respect and honesty prevail.

The mutuality of a great student-teacher relationship can come from an understanding that teachers can learn from students, too. I often say that I learnt more about courage and resilience from my students than I ever taught them. I also learnt how to breed racing pigeons, but that's another story. Get to know your students as people: the things that excite them, scare them, inspire them... never dismiss those things. Value them. And share some of you with your students; let them see your joy, some of your frustrations and fears. Remember that the essence of education is actually about the development of people and, to develop people, you will always need high levels of human interaction.

I always believed that all of my students were excellent and managed them with that in mind, rather than assuming that they were incompetent and managing them accordingly. One of the greatest problems I see in ineffective classrooms is where students are not trusted and as a result are controlled rather than empowered. Set clear parameters and rules but then let your students free with the understanding that to be in 'the club' they must respect and respond to the boundaries, then have fun.

My teaching mantra is characterized in three words: Firstly, LIVE. Education should be a celebration of life. Our job is to help students develop meaningful and tangible aspirations. We need to make sure that our students feel like we care for them as individuals, not just as a cohort, and that they are people, not data. When you decide on class systems and routines, ask yourself if they are designed for your benefit first or for theirs. Secondly, LEARN. We need to make sure that we don't sell learning to our students as always about

preparing for tomorrow, but to ensure that it is a celebration of today; of new experiences, knowledge and contexts for now, not just as preparation for a test or grades. Learning needs to matter for the now if it is to really make sense and inspire kids to want more. Finally, LAUGH. Education is the most important gift civilized society can pass to its young, but it doesn't have to be serious all the time. People who are relaxed and having fun will always be the most open to learning. School and classrooms aren't purgatory, they are life.

"The mutuality of a great student=teacher relationship can come from an understanding that teachers can learn from students, too."

*Richard Gerber in Education Week
Teacher*

Responses From Readers

Dr. Paul David Scaletta:

I thinking forming relationships with kids starts the same way it does with adults when they start dating or get a new neighbor- by finding common interests and similarities. These are the bonds which relationships are built on. Almost always- we have more in common with each other than we realize. Teachers who deliberately and regularly facilitate class building activities- and participate in them themselves- where students have opportunities

to talk about their interests and listen to that of their classmates (and teacher) are doing important work towards forming relationships with AND between students.

Everything else can build on this. The teacher who has lunch with a student or two now has starting point for chit chat. They now know which kids to talk to on Monday about the results of the football game and which or which one might be interested in hearing about the bird that landed in their back yard. Friendships and relationships start with people getting to know each other.

Thanks to Donna, Marcus, Tara, Jennifer, Stuart, Alisha, Eileen, and Richard, and to readers, for their contributions.

Please feel free to leave a comment with your reactions to the topic or directly to anything that has been said in this post.

Consider contributing a question to be answered in a future post. You can send one to me at lferlazzo@epe.org. When you send it in, let me know if I can use your real name if it's selected or if you'd prefer remaining anonymous and have a pseudonym in mind.

You can also contact me on Twitter at [@Larryferlazzo](https://twitter.com/Larryferlazzo).

Education Week has published a collection of posts from this blog, along with new material, in an e-book form. It's titled [Classroom Management Q&As: Expert Strategies for Teaching](#).